Risks of Mosquito-Borne Diseases in Montana: Present and Future

West Nile virus (WNV) first entered Montana in 2002 and has been a sobering wake-up call about emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases that can affect our state. Mosquitoes in Montana are capable of transmitting a variety of infectious diseases to humans, livestock, and other animals. Because of changes in global trade and climate, these diseases will continue to enter Montana (possibly with greater frequency and virulence) and pose new risks to our citizens and economy.

Not only will emerging infectious diseases continue to enter Montana and pose risks in and of themselves, but other risks will emerge as a result of the new diseases. These risks will be associated with management of those diseases. For example, in the case of mosquito-borne diseases, mosquito control is often the only viable strategy for disease reduction. In those cases, ecological and human health risks will be incurred from the use of insecticides and other tactics used to control mosquito populations. Also, risks will be realized from medical interventions used to treat these infectious diseases.

The state of Montana must be better prepared to deal with emerging infectious diseases vectored by mosquitoes, other insects, and mites and ticks. To be better prepared, our state must have qualified personnel to manage disease threats and the risks associated with disease management strategies. Also, experts must communicate these issues to the public. To that end, Montana must have a state Mosquito Control Specialist position within the state Department of Agriculture (as described per SB262).

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